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INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE

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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000766

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/16/2019

TAGS: PGOV KDEM PHUM HO

SUBJECT: TFH01: UNIVERSITY RECTOR ON CAMPUS VIOLENCE AND
THE BACKGROUND OF THE COUP

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 703

Classified By: Charge d' affaires Simon Henshaw, reasons 1.4 (d)

11. (C) The Ambassador met with Rector of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) Julieta Castellanos Ruiz on August 12. UNAH was the site of a violent clash between student pro-Zelaya protestors and police on August 5 (reftel), as well as an incident August 4 when students pelted Liberal Party presidential nominee Elvin Santos with water balloons and heckled him after he had spoken at a forum on campus. Castellanos described what took place on campus August 5, noting that students had received permission from the university to protest that morning, and were doing so peacefully on campus, while there were other protestors burning tires on the street outside the gates. Just before noon, police entered the campus, which Castellanos believes angered the students, who began to throw stones. The police responded by throwing the stones back at students and deployed tear gas against them. Castellanos said this clash began just as it was time for students to leave classrooms for the lunchtime break, which aggravated the situation. When she went out to address the situation, she got caught up in the conflict and was pushed down by police. Castellanos noted that the police action was inappropriate, and marked an unnecessary escalation of violence. (Note: police are not authorized to enter the university campus. End note) She believed the police reaction was in part motivated by a desire to punish the student protestors for the Santos incident.

12. (C) Castellanos also discussed her views of the coup, and how it is seen by her students at UNAH. She noted President Zelaya did not begin his term as a radical, but rather as a populist who sought to make some reforms in the Honduran political system. His efforts were met with strong resistance by the political establishment, even within Zelaya's own Liberal Party. Castellanos said this resistance frustrated Zelaya, who eventually aligned with more radical figures in order to push his reforms through, further aggravating the conflict and radicalizing Zelaya. Castellanos said eventually, Zelaya began to lose faith in the validity of the division of political powers, noting the Honduran Presidency is a very weak institution in comparison to other presidential republics. Castellanos concluded that the political establishment felt sincerely threatened as Zelaya's rhetoric became more radical, but given his lack of actual power, the actions of June 28 were excessive, and were

clearly a coup. She notes that while many Hondurans have been able to convince themselves June 28 was not a coup, her students see the event as a textbook case of a coup. Castellanos has spoken out publicly against the coup, but has also advocated a public dialogue between all sides to resolve the crisis. She added that she believes many people on both sides who were previously against resolution and reconciliation have been surprised at the duration of the crisis and are now ready to make peace.

HENSHAW